Core and Dryer

A play by Alba Pratalia

CORE AND DRYER

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This is just a try play. It means nothing and goes nowhere. It's just for the author to train playwriting, as it is her first time doing so.

Characters

Dryer

Core the Eighth

ACT I

Curtain opens.

An unkept garden. Cheap plastic table. Cheap plastic chairs. Nothing matches. Weeds win.

Dryer walks in.

He holds a wine bottle in one hand, a joint in the

other.

He sits.

He gulps wine.

He drags from the blunt.

A black kid enters, leading a crocodile on a leash.

Core the Eighth is nowhere to be seen.

Dryer

Nice monkey you got there.

Black kid (indignant)

That's not a monkey!

Dryer

I wasn't talking to you.

The crocodile smiles.

Curtain.

END OF ACT I.

ACT II

Curtain opens.

Dryer is in the same chair.
The bottle and the blunt are both down to half.

Enters Core the Eighth, pushing a liquor cart.
He wears tweed and a bowtie.

Core
This day seemed never to end.

He dusts off the other chair with his pocket square.
Sits.

Dryer
I feel you. Mine didn't even start.

Core takes a cocktail measuring cup. Measures one ounce of gin. Cracks open a can of tonic water. Pours to fill the glass.

Dryer
No wonder why you're still sober.

Core
It's a cocktail, not an excuse.

Dryer
It's called gin and tonic, not tonic and gin. That's Billy Joel only. Your phrasing is poor.

Core
I enjoy the casual drink every day, but I can't keep up with your alcoholism. I want to live longer.

Dryer
You know what they say. An apple a day, you die anyway.

Core
Yes, but I die later.

Dryer
On purpose? In this life?

Core
I have dreams. Goals to achieve.

Dryer
Goals?

Core
Yes.

Dryer
Goals.

A pause. Dryer squints, as if tasting the word.

Core
To achieve.

Dryer
To achieve?

Core
Yes.

Dryer
Goals to achieve…

He nods slowly, impressed by nothing.

Core
Yes.

Dryer
You.

Core straightens, proud. A tiny smile.

Core
Yes!

Dryer
With that face?

Silence. Core freezes mid-smile. The ice clinks once in the glass. Dryer takes another drag.

Blackout.

Lights back.

A flashback.

Dryer is younger.
Tan suit. Pink shirt. No tie. White Panama hat.
In his hand: a big, thick book.

An Uber pulls up.
Dryer gets in.

Uber
May I ask what's your religion?

Dryer
None. Why?

Uber
Oh. That's one I never heard before.

Dryer
Never heard before what?

Uber
A priest attached to no religion.

Dryer looks at the driver. Then at himself. The suit. The hat.

Dryer
Priest?

Uber
You know. I saw you getting in with the bible…
dressed like that…

Dryer lowers his eyes to the book. Turns it slightly. Reads the cover. As if seeing it for the first time.

Dryer
This is not a bible. It's Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*.

Uber
Oh.

A beat.

Uber
I thought it was a book.

Blackout.

Lights back.

A flashback.

Core is in a field engineering office.
High-visibility jacket. Hard hat off, hanging from a chair.
A desk. Plans. A radio.

The radio crackles.
Many voices overlap. Short technical bursts.
Inaudible. Functional. Bored.

Then one voice cuts through.

Ian (on radio, static)
Fuck me.

Pause.

From the radio: inaudible.

Ian (on radio)
Up yours, that.

Pause.

From the radio: inaudible.

Ian (on radio, static, then double static)
Well I won't flip twice over to come and fuck your mum.

Core closes his eyes. Opens them. Presses the transmit button.

Core
Ian, if you swear on the radio channel again I'll have to send you another disciplinary warning.

Pause.

Silence.
Then—

Ian (on radio)
Well fuck me sideways and call me Sandy.

Pause.

A longer pause.
The radio hisses. Nobody laughs.

Core exhales. His voice breaks, just a little.

Core
···It's Sally.
It's "and call me Sally".

Radio static. Inaudible.

Blackout.

Lights back.

Two stage hands are caught mid-action, frozen while moving props.
A heavy prop, awkward, one extremity each. Their knees bent. Backs already regretting life.

Hand 1
Oops.

Breaks the fourth wall. Waves at the audience. A small, apologetic wave. Then turns to Hand 2.

What's happening?

Hand 2

It happens that we're moving props and backdrop according to someone who doesn't know how real theatre works. Like Core.
Who said to the author of this play, *"But look, in theatre we can't exactly change the scenery every two minutes."*
Because he wanted back to the unkept garden.

A beat. The prop tilts dangerously.

Hand 1

(re-gripping his side of the prop)
Why people who don't know just keep shutting up instead of giving air to their mouth?

Hand 2
(adjusts grip, straining)
Go figure.

They resume moving the props.
Slow. Careful. Professional resentment.

The sound of dragging wood.
Breathing.
No music.

Lights slowly fade to black.

Lights back.

The unkept garden again.
Same cheap plastic table. Same chairs. Same weeds winning.

Core and Dryer sit as before.

From backstage: the sound of props being dragged, wood scraping, metal clanking.
Hand 1 and Hand 2 curse softly, then louder.

Someone drops something. A muffled "for fuck's sake".

Dryer has an empty bottle at his feet.
In his hand: a new one. Already open.
The blunt is almost gone, hanging on out of spite.

Core prepares another drink.
Careful. Ritualistic.
He measures exactly one ounce of gin.
The rest is tonic. No splash more.

Dryer
Careful with that.
You might get tipsy in ten to fourteen business days.

He takes a long, disrespectful sip straight from the bottle.

Core
There are proportions in cocktails.
Rules are rules and must be followed.

Ice clinks. Core stirs once. Stops.

Dryer
The sobriety law in cocktail making is really new to me.

Core
Well. Welcome to my world.

Dryer exhales smoke. Looks around. Gestures vaguely at the garden. The noise backstage. The chair.

Dryer
Oh no, thanks.
I'll stay in mine.
We drink here.

Core scoffs.

A prop crashes backstage. A final curse. Silence.

Core
Nothing to be done.

Dryer shifts in his chair. The plastic creaks like it's tired of the conversation.

Dryer
I'm beginning to come round to that opinion.
When are Oliver and Hardy expected to arrive?
You're sure it was here?

Core
What?

Dryer
That we were to wait.

Core
They said by the tree.

They both look at the tree.

A long look. An evaluative look. The kind of look normally reserved for bad investments.

Dryer
Do you see any others?

Core
What is it?

Dryer
A tree?

Core
It's a plant with wood body and roots and branches and leaves.

Dryer
Where are the leaves?

Core
It must be dead.

Dryer
No more weeping.

Core
Or perhaps it's not the season.

He squints.

Looks to me more like a bush.

Dryer

A shrub.

No, a shrubbery.

One that looks nice.

And not too expensive.

Core turns slowly toward Dryer.

Core

What are you insinuating?

That we've come to the wrong place?

Dryer

They should be here.

You said it.

They look back at the tree.

The tree does not respond.

Blackout.

Lights back.

A flashback.

Inside a car.
Night presses against the windows. Nothing outside but dark and suggestion.

Core and Dryer face the audience.
Core behind the steering wheel.
Dryer rides shotgun.

Both are full of piss and vinegar.
Three sheets to the wind and counting.

Core hiccups.
Each hiccup summons a curse, like muscle memory.

Core
Hic—fuck me.

He flicks the right turn signal. Turns right.

Core
Hick—fuckity fuck.

Left turn signal. Turns left.

The indicators click like a metronome for bad decisions.

Dryer

(*slurrying*)
I'm pretty sure you don't need to put turn signals when you go around a bend.
Also—we're in the middle of nowhere.
Who are you signaling to?

Core grips the wheel tighter. Another hiccup.

Core
Hic—camadonna.
Fuc—hic—me and call me Sandy.

Dryer
It's Sally.

The turn signal keeps clicking.
The car keeps moving.
Neither of them looks at the road.

Blackout.

Lights back.

Another flashback.

Back in Core's field engineering office.
Same fluorescent light. Same tired walls.
Plans pinned crooked. Coffee gone cold hours ago.

Core stands by the desk.
Dryer in front of it.
Two unnamed men opposite them.

The two men are visibly in distress.
Shirts dark with sweat.
Hard hats clutched like flotation devices.

Dryer
Can you explain to me how in heaven or on earth,

with this density,
you thought you could sell me that you were
charging this weight in this volume?

The two men sweat more.
It seems medically impressive.

Core turns slightly away.
Bites his lip.
Fails.

Man 1
Professor, you see—

Dryer
Don't professor me.
You were trying to sell us five kilos per hole.
With this diameter and this length,
you wouldn't fit more than two and a half kilos
with any of your operational densities.

The two men exchange a look.
It's the look people exchange before drowning.

Man 2

Professor, I won't even tell you.
Antani, double traction, even with asphalted supercazzola,
comes with a right-hand scappellamento.

A pause.

Dryer nods slowly.
As if considering a serious proposal.

Dryer

I see.
Either you have no idea what you're doing,
or you do have an idea and you're blatantly trying to steal.
I tend to believe in the first.

The men are now on the verge of tears.

Man 1

(voice cracking)
We're engineers too!

Dryer softens.
Puts on a tone usually reserved for children and pets.

Dryer
There, there.
No need to cry.
But of course you are, sweetheart.

Core can't hold it anymore.
He drops under the desk, shoulders shaking, laughing silently, violently, tears streaming.

The two men stand frozen.
Sweating.
Unforgiven.

Lights hold.

Blackout.

Lights back.

The unkept garden.
Same plastic furniture. Same defeated vegetation.
Night now. Or later. Time has stopped caring.

Under Dryer's chair: two empty wine bottles, neatly collapsed like fallen soldiers.
He's chugging from a third.
The blunt is gone. His hands no longer cooperate.
A bong has entered the conversation.

Dryer inhales. Coughs. Recovers with dignity he does not possess.

In his lap: *Gramsci's Prison Notebooks.*
1971 International Publishers edition.
Dog-eared. Annotated. Abused.

Core is on his third gin and tonic.
Each one engineered.
Each one tragically sober.

He measures exactly one ounce of gin.

Core

Of course my owner—

(corrects himself)

I mean boss—

has the right to retain my surplus value.

He pours the gin.

Core

He pays me, but he also takes all the risks.

He cracks the tonic can. Slow pour.

Core

The capital investment they took to give me a place to be exploited—

A micro-pause.

Eh. I mean to work.

He adjusts the glass. Perfect.

Core

I have a salary only because they took risks.

So I owe them my surplus value.

Of course I do.

Dryer looks up from the book.

Red eyes. Philosophical patience.

He takes a long pull from the bottle.

Dryer

Sure, sweetheart.

Sure.

A bong bubble. A cough.

You're an engineer too.

Core nods enthusiastically, stirring once. Stops.

Core

That's what I'm saying!

Dryer goes back to reading.
The bong gurgles like it agrees.

Offstage, faintly, a prop bangs.
Someone swears.

The garden does not react.

Lights hold.

Core
Anyway, don't change the subject.

Dryer
Me? Change the—

Core
I need you to concentrate.

Dryer
Concentrate?
Should I pour half of myself in the sink?

Core narrows his eyes. Professional. Wounded.

Core

That happened only once.
And technically it was reduction.
We were late and cooking for my boss.

Dryer

The good one.
The one who deserves your surplus value.

Core

Precisely him.
And your sauce was still too watery.

Dryer

The boss allergic to onion and garlic,
who got served onion and garlic anyway,
didn't even realize it,
and still walks this valley of tears.

Core leans forward.

Core

You jeopardized my job.

Dryer
And your surplus value.

A beat.

Core
Especially that.

They sit.
Bottle glugs.
Ice melts.

Lights hold.

Core
Anyway, it's all the fault of the ozone hole.

Dryer
What fault?

Core
Black people all have rhythm in their blood.

Dryer

They have what?

What does this have to do with—

Core

Once, here, it was all countryside.

Dryer

Don't go there…

Core

When you're thirsty, there's nothing better than a good glass of water.

Dryer reaches down. Produces an icy beer can from nowhere. Cracks it open. Drinks.

Core

It's not so much the heat as the humidity.

In walks an old lady. Slowly. Purposefully. She walks toward Core and Dryer.

Core

There's a crisis, there's a crisis, sure.
Why then everyone has at least two cars?

Dryer

I'm totally lost.

The woman arrives. She stands between Core and Dryer. Perfectly centered.

Woman

Core is absolutely right.

All characters freeze.

Dryer turns his head toward the audience. Breaks the fourth wall.

Dryer

You understand this last scene makes no sense at all. It's here only because Core begged the author to put it in.

He turns back.

Characters unfreeze.

Core
In this day and age they make everything with little powders.

The woman nods. Slowly. Wisely. As if absorbing profound truth.

Core
Also: we don't have four seasons anymore.

The woman keeps nodding.

Lights hold.

Dryer
So, anyway…
Shouldn't they be here by now?

Core
(cellphone in hand, frowning at it)
They must be out of signal reach.
The call doesn't go through.

Dryer
Does it ever?

Core
What?

Dryer
The call.
Multi vocati sunt, pauci vero electi.

Core
You know I didn't study the classics.
Stop boasting.

Dryer
It's the responsibility of those with an education in the classics
to ridicule anyone else who doesn't have one.
It's the only reason to learn declensions.

Core
Romanes eunt domus.

A beat.

Dryer

Romanes Africani an Europaei?

Core stares at him. The phone buzzes once. Stops.

Core

…Yes.

They sit in silence.

The garden listens.

The call still doesn't go through.

Dryer

They have no idea where to reach us, do they?

Core

They have the Google Maps location.

Dryer

And you say they know how to use it, right?

Core

They're engineers too.

Dryer
You are perfectly aware they are not.

Core
At least give them the benefit of the doubt.

Dryer
As in: we doubt we'll ever see them, right?

A pause. Core looks at his phone. No bars. No hope.

Core
Afraid so.

Dryer nods. Drinks.
Core adjusts his bowtie.
The tree remains undecided between life and shrubbery.

Lights dim, but not fully. The waiting continues.

Dryer
Gulps down the last wine in the bottle.

Throws it away with the others. The plastic clatter echoes more than it should.

He looks down for another.
Nothing.

Looks left.
Nothing.

Looks right.
Nothing.

Looks behind.
Turns behind.
Bends behind.
Swivels over the back legs of the chair—

The plastic legs snap.

THUMP.

Dryer disappears backward in a graceless collapse.

Dryer
Fuck!
I'm out of booze.

Core lifts his last can of tonic. Shakes it. Hollow metallic rattle.
He shakes the entire cardboard box. It answers with silence.

Core
And I'm out of booze-neighbor beverage.

Dryer
Fuck.

A long pause. The garden absorbs the tragedy.

Core
Someone should go to the store.

Dryer
(from the ground, trying to get up, failing)
I'll go.

He attempts dignity. It refuses.

Core
I'll come along.
Here, let me help.

Core stands. Offers a hand. Pulls Dryer up. It's a slow, jointed, inelegant ascent.

Dryer pats the bottom of his trousers.
Dusts off his jacket sleeves.
Checks for structural integrity.

Dryer
Well.
Shall we go?

Core
Yes.
Let's go.

They stand.
Side by side.
Facing forward.

They do not move.

The tree does not move.
The garden does not move.
Nothing moves.

Curtain.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

Curtain opens.

Core and Dryer stand.
Facing the audience.
Still in the unkept garden.

The shrubbery—somehow—stands too.
Not taller.
Not greener.
But present. Assertive.

A faint orchestral swell. Imaginary but sincere.

Canto:
Core and Dryer (tenor, with misplaced operatic conviction)
Bella figlia dell'amoooore

Controcanto:
The Shrubbery (contralto, vegetal but resonant)
Plom plom plom

Canto:
Schiavo son dei vezzi tuooooooi.

Controcanto:
Plom plom plom

Core lifts one hand dramatically. Dryer sways slightly but remains upright.

Canto:
Col un detto, un detto tu puooooooi

Controcanto (higher pitch, leafy vibrato):
Plom plom plom

Dryer clutches his chest. Core widens his stance.

Canto (molto forte on "pene"):
Le mie pene, le mie pene consolaaaaar

A heroic pause.

Then—

All: Core, Dryer, The Shrubbery
Lallallero lallallero lallalero lallero,
lalallallero, lallero, lallero

They hold the final note far too long.
The shrubbery sustains.
Core overprojects.
Dryer slightly off-key but committed.

Silence.

Curtain.

END OF ACT III.

END OF THE PLAY.